

Our Lady of Mount Carmel: The Gift Of Wonder

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We tend to live in a society today that is very instantaneous. It is driven by the latest trends in technology and the great miracle of modern medicine. We can now see the stars going back in billions of years and we sense that there are more marvels to come.

At the same time, we are bound to a world that is also very fractured in terms of our relationships with each other, with other nations and with a marvellous creation of which we should be stewards, but tend to be exploiters.

Sadly, we also live in a world that is not terribly reflective. Somehow we have lost the art of wondering, of seeking the deeper meaning in the things we experience. We can be a very superficial people propelled into a morass of different experiences but not always being able to decipher the good from the not so good; the true from what is false.

The beauty of today's feast is that we celebrate someone who can teach us to wonder, to reflect, to learn from experience and to stop and ponder in our hearts all that happens to us.

Mary, the mother of Jesus and Carmel is such a figure. Her solicitude and care for her family is found in her own words in the gospel where she is described beautifully as someone who treasured all these things and pondered upon them.

In other words, we need to listen to the ways in which God is speaking to us. To be attentive to the blessings and treasures that we can experience here and now and never lose the sense of wonder and reflection and contemplation on the meaning of life.

Many years ago, a great theologian of the Second Vatican Council, Karl Rahner, spoke of everyone being capable of being a mystic. He spoke of the importance of

everyday mysticism. Now that might frighten us a little, but it is true. Every time we take the opportunity to exercise the gift of wonder, we are drawn into the mystery of life as God sees it. You and I are called to the wonder, to the contemplation of the reality of God no matter who or where we are in life.

If you think of Mary's life, it is a treasure trove of events to ponder upon and to discern about:

Her pregnancy and betrothal
Her motherhood of a somewhat bewildering adolescent
Her involvement in his ministry whether at a marriage feast or in the countryside or towns
Her presence as her son's life was taken from him
And her experience of the gift of God's spirit in the earliest of the communities which followed her son.

The gift of wondering is a reality that is open to each of us. We don't always find the answers to what we ponder about but the sheer act of taking the time to wonder draws us into a magnificent mystery of God's being in the world.

It is this tremendous gift of wonder that is part of what it means to be a Carmelite. And it is from Mary, the Mother of Carmel, that we draw our inspiration. Every Carmelite, as is every Christian, is called to be an everyday mystic. Now that is a far cry from saying that we live life with our heads in the clouds. No, it means rather that we are drawn into the very real and, at times, very messy dimensions of human existence. It means that Carmelites are expected to get their hands dirty with the reality of living.

It also means that there is absolutely nothing in human experience that isn't touched by the mystery of God. The delight in a garden is as truly part of human experience as is the experience of someone whose life is ebbing away in the most shocking ways possible. You see, Mary is the mother of all who live and it is in the joy and the pain of being human that we seek to wonder upon the mystery of God's love for us and all creation.

These are not easy words simply because we want everything in life to be beautiful and happy and harmonious. No, the reality of life is far more complex and extraordinarily brutal. As Carmelites, the reality of the pain and desolation experienced by ourselves and others is always an invitation to plumb the depths of God's mystery. This is true because there is absolutely nothing in creation that does not bear a trace or glimpse of God. God is as present in a garden as much as he is present in the depths of human alienation, oppression and pain. It is our task as Carmelites to plumb these depths and to ask ourselves the question: where is God?

In my own heart, I think that Mary, the mother of the Lord, is the most powerful and life-giving of models because she has been there before us. She is not just a

pretty statue or holy card. Mary is the disciple of her son, who invites us to explore, to rejoice, to discover and to bow humbly before the mystery of a God who is greater than anything we can imagine.

As Carmelites we are privileged to have her as our patron and we thank her for teaching us the way to wonder and to contemplate.

Mary, Mother and Beauty of Carmel, pray for us and with us.